Review article

Epidemiology of dementia in Asia: Insights on prevalence, trends and novel risk factors

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ABSTRACT

Asia is the most populous region in the world and its rapidly growing societies are the sources of global development. However, accompanying this rapid growth is aging of the population with increasing occurrence of diseases, of which dementia is the most prominent, which provide major challenges to healthcare systems. Dementia prevalence in Asia has previously been found to be lower than Western populations, but recent studies show that age-specific prevalence rates are similar globally. Overall dementia prevalence is expected to rise dramatically across Asia due to maturing populations.

Earlier Asian studies reported a lower prevalence of Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and a higher prevalence of vascular dementia (VaD). Recent studies, however, show a reversal of this ratio that now parallels that of Western countries. This change may be attributed to an altered demographic profile, urbanization, environmental reactions, ethnicity and advances in the use of neuroimaging modalities.

Several factors may influence the results of epidemiological studies including changes in societal perception of aging, family attitudes, validity of assessment tools due to language and literacy, and medical practitioners’ expertise in recognizing dementia. Nevertheless, epidemiological studies in Asia may reveal factors contributory to inter-ethnic differences in dementia. Potentially modifiable risk factors apparent only in low and middle-income countries and gene–environment interactions may underlie these disparities and identification of such factors may lead to effective treatments.

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1. Introduction

The population of Asia in 2009 is estimated at 4 billion, 59% of a global total of 6.8 billion [1]. World population growth will be concentrated in low and middle-income areas with the largest absolute...